

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, June 21, 1876, with transcript

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL TO MABEL (Hubbard) BELL Grand Villa Hotel, June 21st, 1876. My darling May:

Fate has brought me here against my will and now she seems determined to keep me in spite of myself.

The ghosts of my normal class haunt me as I wonder through the Centennial Buildings saying "How about our examination papers" — In vain I say — "Avaunt and quit my sight!" — "Let the earth cover thee — Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold and etc.," — They refuse to listen to the words of Shakespeare — but exclaim continuously "Our examination papers — our diplomas and etc."

The only way I can get rid of them is by referring them to you! Whenever I think of your dear face — and feel that I am here for your sake and at your device — troubles melts away — and my goblin friends dissolve "into thin air." I hope darling that it is all for the best that I am here — and I will not trouble you any more with useless murmurs of dissatisfaction.

I must tell you now however of one thing that has prevented me from writing as I wished — what do you think! My unfortunate organ did not make its appearance and my whole exhibit was incomplete without it.

I have been hunting high and low all over Philadelphia for it — and have found by sad experience how large this city is. I gave the baggage master my card to fasten to it — and pencilled the address upon it "Trans Continental Hotel" — but at the Hotel they knew nothing about it. Last night in great distress I felt that I should have to go to New York

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for it — for it was no use seeing Sir William or the other judges without it. I had made up my mind last night that I should never see it again and was just going into the Trans Continental Hotel for some supper — when — what should I see in the passage way — but my poor unfortunate organ!! Safe and sound.

Safe and sound did I say! — well I find on examination that it has been somewhat injured and a few of the notes will not work — still I think I shall be able to make it work. It had been there ever since Sunday night although the Hotel people did not know.

I introduced myself to Sir William Thompson today — just as he was examining Elisha Gray's Telephonic apparatus — I verily believe too that it was Elisha Gray himself who stood beside him when I handed him my card!

Sir William is a splendid genial good-hearted and wise-headed looking man, very plebeian in appearance but with a head and a manner that betoken a man of genius.

What was my delight — when he addressed me — to hear a good broad scotch accent tinging his utterance!! When I see him again I shall certainly announce my nativity — and who knows but that the announcement may do me some good!

Sir William expressed great interest in my invention and said that he wished to have a glimpse of the instruments before he left the building — so he asked me to remain near him until he had finished an examination of some instruments belonging to the Western Union Telegraph Company — and then if he had time he would take a look at mine.

It was really a pleasure to see him examining the apparatus. He was so absorbed and excited that he forgot all about poor me — and even neglected his wife too I am afraid. At least I suppose that it was Lady Thompson who finally came up to him, and laid her gloved hand upon his shoulder to attract his attention — for they looked at each other so lovingly that they could only be man and wife.

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He looked quite entreatingly at her — and so she took a seat and let him go on with his study of the instrument before him. Twice had she to touch him to remind him of the time and of some engagement. But he was too absorbed to be interrupted. He remained at least half an hour after her arrival before he could tear himself away from the instrument.

At last he looked up and saw me — and apologized for having kept me waiting so long — and was sorry he should have to hurry away to catch a train without seeing my instruments. He stated that he was coming to the Building on Sunday with the Emperor Don Pedro — to see Mr. Gray's instruments and asked me to exhibit mine at the same time!

I must say I don't like this at all — and would rather avoid a direct collision with Mr. Gray if possible.

However I suppose fate has decided! And it must be done. I feel very nervous about it — for I feel I have come on here very hurriedly without sufficient preparation to be thrown into direct collision with Mr. Gray.

Mr. Gray has command of a large battery power — and has every facility for a successful experiment — whereas I have few facilities— and I have no one to help me — not even to play my organ for me.

Oh! for Willie or even Eddie Wilson at this time. They could be perfect God-sends to me. There is only one thing I can stand my own upon — and that is — theory.

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I can talk and explain and Sir William will understand. I can at all events show him I have the theory — even if my exhibit will not stand a show beside Gray's.

I gave Sir William a copy of my latest patent and of the pamphlet with your illustrations in it.

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Let us hope for the best — but I must say that your poor Alec feels very hopeless and heartbroken about it.

I shall be glad when the whole thing is over. I wish the whole telegraph were off my hands altogether — and I were free to devote myself to one thing .

If I don't make a change and very soon — Telegraphy and Visible Speech together will be the end of me — and then we shall never be married at all. There what a horrid fellow I am! Did I not begin by promising not to murmur any more? And here I am again finding fault with what can't be helped.

Forgive me darling for writing such a rigmarole as this letter. I would tear it all up now did I not know that I should not have time to write another.

I must tell you how it is I am managing to write to you now. You know I cannot write during the day-time here — and Mr. Hubbard's presence in my room prevents me from keeping the gas lighted after he has retired at night. But tonight behold me in the office (1) writing away to my heart's content. It is now twenty minutes to eleven — and I intend to go on till the clock strikes.

This Hotel is a very curious kind of place. It consists of six or seven private dwellings united together.

A communication has been made through the walls from one to the other — and the whole composite mass of houses has been dubbed 5 “A Hotel.”!The rooms are very comfortable — but I can't say so much for the board. However as we only breakfast here it is no greater matter. I have seen nothing of the Horsfords all day as I had to leave at seven o'clock in order to get my organ into the Centennial Building.

No goods are admitted after eight o'clock in the morning and I had to spend half an hour or so in trying to obtain a permit.

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Visitors have to pay 50 cents for admission, and once within the enclosure they are prisoners. If you come out — you must pay again before you can get in. This arrangement has been made I suppose for the benefit of the Restaurant inside the building. The whole neighbourhood of the Exhibition outside consists of a congregation of larger Beer Saloons — 15 cent dining rooms — Fat women shows — and Bowling Alleys — but a most extraordinary thing is that they are all empty. The unfortunate proprietors sit in their shirt-sleeves at the doors locking with disconsolate faces at the multitude thronging into the Centennial Building — but alas for them — none came out again till the evening .

By that time appetites have been appeased and all the surplus ch?? has been got rid of.

The majority of the small speculators here will undoubtedly be ruined as they have evidently gone to great expense in preparing for “A big thing.”

I really wish you could be here May to see the Exhibition. It is wonderful! You can have no idea of it till you see it. It grows upon one. It is so prodigious and so wonderful that it absolutely staggers one to realize what the word “Centennial Exhibition” means. Just think of having the products of all nations condensed into a few acres of buildings.

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I am surprised to see what a splendid show the chinese are making. How presumptuous of us to think ourselves so far superior to them. If I had only a little money to spare — I would buy some of the chinese works of art for you. However as I haven't I can only look over everything and settle in my own mind what I should give you if I had.

I am glad you can't see the display of jewelry for I am afraid you would never be satisfied with any ordinary income after seeing that. What do you think of a table of solid silver weighing 4002 pounds. There is one in the Brazilian Department.

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One thing that gratified me exceedingly was to meet Monsieur Koenig, the inventor of the manometric capsule — (you remember the little instrument with the vibrating flame and the revolving mirrors)-

Monsieur Koenig has a splendid exhibit of Tuning-forks and scientific apparatus.

We had a long talk on scientific subjects in the French Language. He spoke French and I English — and we got on very nicely.

But I must be wearing out your patience — and my time has expired.

How I wish I could be with you now — I miss you so very much. You have become so much a part of my heart — that I feel that I have separated from myself in leaving you. Don't be uneasy about me dear.

Remember you must not have such pale cheeks when I see you again. You must become a substantial reality — and not a ghost — by the time I return.

You better learn to obey me at once (!) by putting a little colour into your cheeks — Natural colour remember — no artificiality for me!

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So you have decided to become a good and loyal subject of Queen Victoria have you? Well! Wonders will never cease. Perhaps I shall become a Yankee! Is this letter long enough? If not — let me know and I shall try again. With much love to Mrs. Hubbard and to Berta and Grace and still more for your dear self.

Your loving, Alec. Miss Mabel Hubbard, Cambridge.